The Bill of Rights (Amendments 1-10):
The first 10 amendments protect our fundamental freedoms.

1st: Freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition.

2nd: Right to keep and bear arms.
3rd: No forced quartering of soldiers in homes.

4th: Freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures.

5th: Right to due process; no double jeopardy or self-incrimination.

6th: Right to a speedy, public trial by jury.

7th: Right to a jury trial in civil cases.

8th: No excessive bail or fines, or cruel/unusual punishment.

9th: The Constitution does not include all the rights of the people and the states.

10th: Any powers that the Constitution does not give to the federal government belong to the states.

11th: Citizens cannot sue states in federal courts. (There are some exceptions).

12th: The President and Vice President are elected on a party ticket.

13th: Slavery is illegal in the United States.

14th: Every person born in the USA is a citizen. An immigrant can become a naturalized citizen.

15th: All US male citizens have the right to vote.

16th Congress can tax income.

17th: The people can elect US Senators.

18th: Alcohol is illegal. (Prohibition).

19th: All US female citizens have the right to vote.

20th: The President is inaugurated in January. Congress begins to meet in January.

21st: Alcohol is legal. Each state can make laws about making, selling, and drinking alcohol.

22nd: The President cannot serve for more than two terms.

23rd: The US Citizens in the District of Columbia have the right to vote for President.

24th: It is illegal to make a citizen pay a voting fee or take a reading test to vote.

25th: If the president dies or cannot serve, the vice-president becomes president. If both die, the Speaker of the House becomes president.

26th: US citizens who are 18 years old or older have the right to vote.

27th: Congress must limit when and how much its members are paid.

How an Amendment is Made:

1. Proposal: By a 2/3 vote in both houses of Congress OR by a national convention called by 2/3 of states. (All 27 amendments used the first method).

2. Ratification: Approved by 3/4 of state legislatures.

The Three Branches:
To prevent any one part from becoming too powerful, the government is split into three branches:

1. Legislative (Congress)
· Makes the laws.
· Made up of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

2. Executive (President & Cabinet)
· Enforces the laws.
· Includes the President, Vice President, and departments like Defense, Education, etc.

3. Judicial (Courts)
· Interprets the laws.
· The Supreme Court is the highest court. It decides if laws are constitutional.

Checks & Balances:
Each branch has powers to check the others. For example, the President can veto a law from Congress, but Congress can override the veto with a 2/3 vote.

The Basics:
The Constitution is the supreme law of the United States. It was written in 1787 and has been amended (changed) 27 times. It creates the government, defines its powers, and protects the rights of citizens.

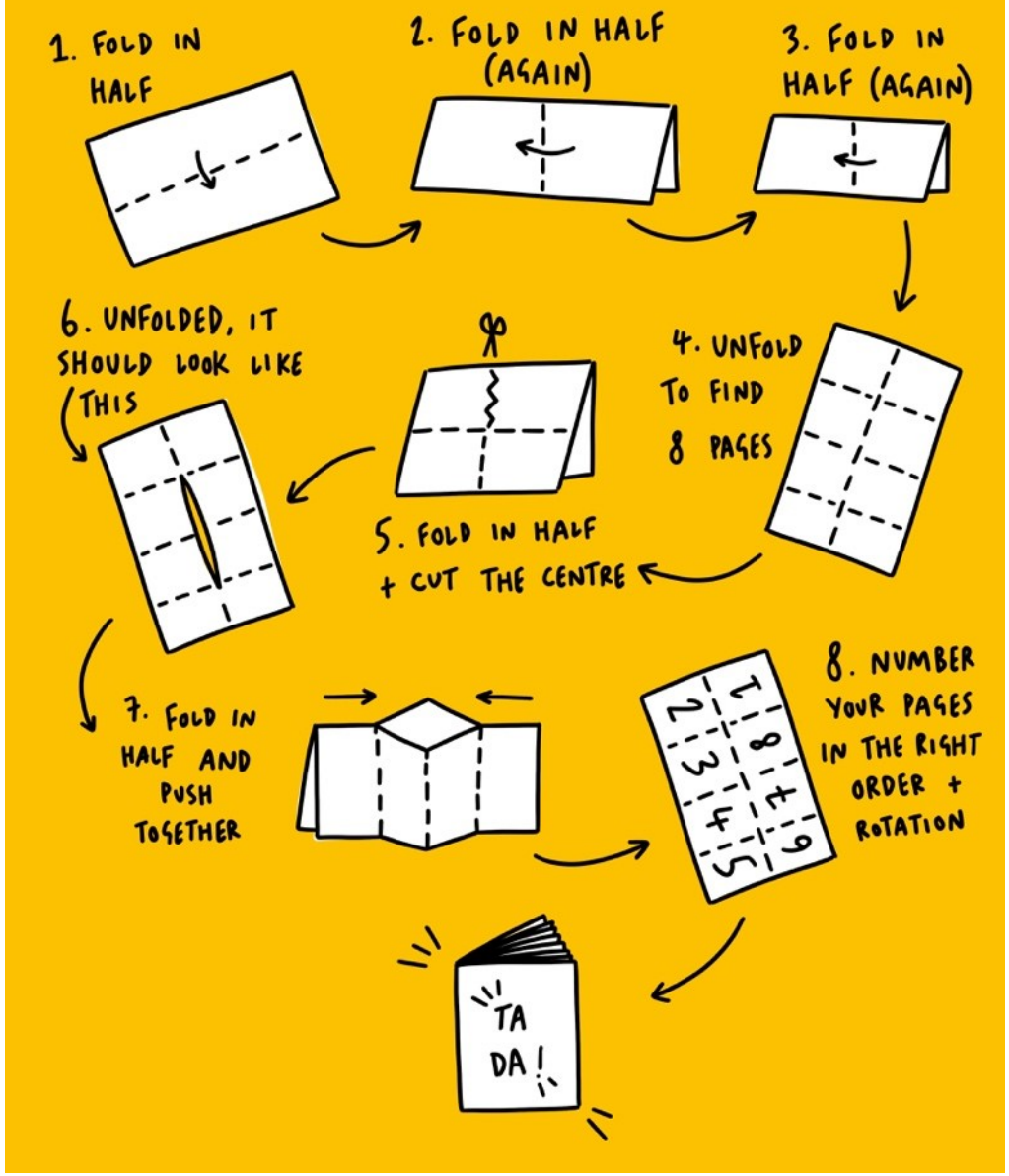
The Preamble:
"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, ensure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

The Constitution of the United States of America

(A Simple Guide)

Helpful Resources:
www.aclu.org
www.lsc.gov
www.yourlegalaid.org
www.ccrjustice.org

The U.S. Constitution, A Living Document:
The Constitution is designed to change with the times through the amendment process. It is the foundation of American democracy.

Spread the word!
KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

HOW TO MAKE A ZINE